DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 651 CS 505 146

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TITLE Male/Female Levels of Participation in Regional and National Individual Events Tournaments.
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (71st, Denver, CO, November 7-10, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; *Competition; *Debate; *Females; *Males; Persuasive Discourse; *Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS Debate Tournaments; *Individual Events (Forensics)

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to (1) describe the male/female participation and success in regional and national forensic individual events tournament competition, and (2) identify areas of gender-based inequity from these data. Letters requesting 1984-85 tournament results were sent to 44 individual events tournament directors, of which 20 were sufficient for accurate tabulation. Participants' sex and male/female distribution ratios for both preliminary and elimination rounds of competition were determined. Of the 5,325 participants from 20 regional individual events tournaments competing in 10 national events, 52% were male and 48% were female. Of the participants advancing to the final rounds in the 10 national events, 55% were male and 45% were female. The results indicated that while the forensic community perceives original speaking events and limited preparation events as reflecting a slight male dominance, there is in fact a slight male dominance in the former but a distinct male dominance in the latter at both regional and national levels. The results also indicated a slight male dominance in participation and success that ranges from "moderate (55% male, 45% female) in final rounds at regional tournaments to "overwhelming" (63% male, 37% female) in final rounds of national competition. (HTH)

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MALE/FEMALE LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INDIVIDUAL EVENTS TOURNAMENTS

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Speech Communication Association Convention
Denver, Colorado

November 7-10, 1985

CS 505 146

ABSTRACT

While the educational value of forensics participation has long been established, the parity with which that educational opportunity has been afforded to both men and women is questionable. The Second National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Northwestern University endorsed a resolution "to increase and strengthen forensic participation by identifying ethnic, racial, gender, and handicap barriers which may currently inhibit student participation as well as disseminate findings concerning such barriers throughout the forensic community." In recent years, forensic educators have begun to examine male/female participation and success in forensics. Since both perceptions and actual data from these studies "suggest" there is an imbalance in male/female participation, the purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to describe the male/female participation and success in both regional and national individual events tournament competition and 2) to identify areas of gender-based inequity from this data.

INTRODUCTION

While the educational value of forensics participation has long been established, the parity with which that educational opportunity has been afforded to both men and women is questionable. In 1974, the National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Sedalia included among its conference recommendations a call for research to "determine why certain individuals, women and minority group members, resist involvement" (McBath, 1975, p. 23). During the following decade some demographic descriptions of debaters and tournament participants were developed, but no concerted effort to conduct research recommended by the conference was made; the extent to which female and minority group participation was limited in forensics remained speculative. Ten years later, the Second National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Northwestern University endorsed a resolution "to increase and strengthen forensic participation by identifying ethnic, racial, gender, and handicap barriers which may currently inhibit student participation as well as disseminate findings concerning such barriers throughout the forensic community" (Parson, 1985, p. 43).

In recent years, forensic educators have begun to examine male/female participation and success in forensics. An exploratory survey conducted within the forensic community sought to identify the perceptions of male/female participation in forensics (Friedley and Nadler, in press). The results of this study indicated that males are perceived to be more disproportionately represented in debate participation and that debate is perceived as a "masculine" activity with male participants experiencing

few gender-related barriers. Data such as this suggests that males are adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations when they participate in debate because it is perceived as a "masculine" activity. Female debate participants, however, experience more gender-related barriers because they are not adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations.

In individual events, the study reported that male/female participation is perceived as more "balanced." While females are perceived to be more prevalent and have a slight advantage in individual events, both sexes are subject to perceptual limitations in this activity. For example, female participants come closer to meeting sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations in individual events; however, perceived barriers of "competitiveness," "aggressiveness," and "intellectual respect" in the original speaking events and limited preparation events is apparent. According to respondents, males also face perceptual barriers primarily in the interpretive events which are perceived to be "feminine;" thus, participants who excell in these events are not perceived to be adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations.

In an attempt to compare "perceptions" about forensic participation and success with actual data, Friedley and Manchester (1985) examined male/female participation and success from three national forensic tournaments in 1984: 1) the National Debate Tournament, 2) the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, and 3) the National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals. Examination of the actual male/female participation level at the 1984 National Debate

Tournament indicated that participation in the tournament was largely dominated by males. Though one female did advance to the final round of this national competition, there were considerably fewer male/female teams and female/female teams competing than male/male teams; in fact, no female/female team advanced beyond the quarter-final rounds of competition.

While descriptive data from the preliminary rounds of competition at the 1984 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the 1984 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals suggested a general balance in male/female participation ratios, analysis of the elimination rounds at these tournaments reflected a gender-based imbalance which emerged--an imbalance that favored male participants.

Specifically, the data indicated a distinct male domination in the original speaking events and limited preparation events at the American Forensic Association's national tournament while only a male domination in the limited preparation grouping of events at the National Forensic Association's national tournament. Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, was associated with the male/female participation and success in the interpretive events. While previous research had suggested that these events were generally perceived to be more "feminine" and the ones most likely to provide a barrier to male participation because of conflicting sex-role expectations associated with the events, analysis of the data concerning male/female participation ratios at the two national tournaments did not support this perception; instead, males tended to dominate this group of events in the elimination rounds of com-

petition, especially at the American Forensic Association's national tournament.

The benefits accrued through participation in the forensic experience should be available to all individuals regardless of gender. In addition, the argumentative and communicative skills fostered by forensics may be especially beneficial to specific groups of individuals who may not otherwise have the opportunity to develop these skills. Since both perceptions and actual data "suggest" there is an imbalance in male/female participation, the purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to describe the male/female participation and success in both regional and national individual events tournament competition and 2) to identify areas of gender-based inequity from this data.

METHOD

To provide data for this research, letters were sent to forty-four individual events tournaments directors (randomly-selected to assure geographical distribution) requesting a copy of their 1984-85 tournament results. Of those responding, tournaments results from twenty tournaments hosted during the 1984-85 academic year were sufficiently complete for accurate tabulation. In addition, the 1985 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament tabulation sheets which included the participant's complete name were consulted while the 1985 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals tabulation sheets which included only participant last names were compared to the complete names listed on each school's student eligibility form obtained from the Executive Secretary. National tournaments that used a qualifying procedure drawing

from regional tournament competition were deemed most appropriate for a comparison between regional and national competition.

Using this data, the participant's sex was determined by noting obviously sex-typed first names.[1] When a participant's first name was not gender-specific, identification was determined through consultation with various directors of forensics. Participant names from the regional tournaments and the nationals tournaments were then analyzed to determine male/female distribution ratios for both preliminary rounds and elimination rounds of competition. Using these ratios, male/female participant comparisons by event and event groupings were made. The research findings are reported individual in two groupings: 1) Regional Individual Events Tournaments and 2) National Individual Events Tournaments.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Regional Individual Events Tournaments

Of the 5325 participants from twenty regional individual events tournaments competing in ten national events, 52% were male and 48% were female. Combining all ten national events offered at these tournaments, participants advancing to the final rounds were 55% male and 45% female; thus, the gender gap widened slightly as the tournaments progressed from preliminary rounds of competition to final rounds of competition.

Of the 1457 participants in the original speaking events including informative speaking, persuasive speaking, communication analysis/rhetorical criticism, and after dinner speaking, 54% were male and 46% were female.

[1]The authors wish to thank Mr. Kent Wayson for his assistance with the coding and tabulation of data.

That relative gender balance was preserved in final rounds of competition with males representing 51% of the finalists and females representing 49% of the finalists. Of the original speaking events, a relative balance in male/female participation was preserved for informative speaking (47% male, 53% female), persuasive speaking (54% male, 46% female), and communication analysis/rhetorical criticism (54% male, 46% female) in preliminary rounds of competition. The greatest disparity between male/female participation in preliminary rounds occurred in after dinner speaking (65% male, 35% female). In final rounds of competition, females gained a slight dominance in informative speaking (42% male, 58% female) and persuasive speaking (47% male, 53% female) while males maintained a slight dominance in communication analysis/rhetorical criticism (56% male, 44% female). Again, the greatest disparity between male/female balance in final rounds occurred in after dinner speaking where 63% of the finalists were male and only 37% of the finalists were female.

of the 2554 participants in the interpretive events of poetry, prose, drama, and dramatic duo, 46% were male and 54% were female. While there was a slight dominance in female participation during preliminary rounds of competition, that ratio shifted to a slight male dominance in final rounds of competition (52% male, 48% female). During preliminary rounds of competition, all four interpretive events reflected a slight female dominance: poetry interpretation (42% male, 58% female), prose interpretation (46% male, 54% female), dramatic duo (49% male, 51% female), and drama (46% male, 54% female). In final rounds of competition, the slight female dominance continued in poetry interpretation and drama,

but a shift to a slight male dominance emerged in prose interpretation (54% male, 46% female) and dramatic duo (55% male, 45% female).

Of the 1314 participants in the limited preparation events of extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking, 63% were male and 37% were female during the preliminary rounds of competition. As participants advanced to the final rounds of competition in these events, the male dominance became even more pronounced with 69% males and only 31% females. In both preliminary and final rounds of competition, these events reflected the greatest male/female ratio disparity of the three event groupings. Specifically, 58% of the impromptu contestants in preliminary rounds were male while 42% of the impromptu contestants in preliminary rounds were female; by final rounds of competition in this event, however, 65% of the contestants were male and only 35% were female. The male/female ratio disparity was even greater in extemporaneous speaking. In preliminary rounds of competition, 70% of the contestants were male and only 30% of the contestants were female. Given this preliminary round disparity, females were still able to maintain an approximation of that ratio in final rounds (73% male, 27% female).

National Individual Events Tournaments

Of the 2779 participants at the 1985 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the 1985 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals, 53% were male and 47% were female. Combining all ten events in the competition, participants advancing to quarter-final rounds were 58% male and 42% female while participants advancing to semi-final rounds were 61% male and 39% female.

Participants advancing to the final rounds of competition in the combined ten events were 63% male and 37% female; thus, the gender gap widened considerably as the tournament progress through elimination rounds with females dropping from 47% in preliminary rounds, to 42% in quarter-finals, to 39% in semi-finals, and to 37% in final rounds of competition. In all, only 47 of the 126 finalists were females.

Of the 944 participants in the original speaking events including informative speaking, persuasive speaking, communication analysis/rhetorical criticism, and after dinner speaking, 51% were male whil 49% were female. That relative gender balance in participation was somewhat preserved at the quarter-finals rounds of these events (54% male, 46% female), the semi-final rounds of these events (51% male, 49% female), and the final rounds of these events (54% male, 46% female). Of the original speaking events, a slight female dominance in participation was present in only informative speaking (45% male, 55% female) in preliminary rounds of competition. The greatest disparity between male/female participation in preliminary rounds occurred in after dinner speaking (59% male, 41% female). The final rounds of competition in after dinner speaking as well as persuasive speaking included 8 males (77%) and only 4 females (33%). Of the original speaking events, both communication analysis/rhetorical criticism and informative speaking reflected a slight female dominance with 5 males (42%) and 7 females (58%) participating in the final rounds of competition.

Of the 1301 participants in the interpretive events of poetry, prose, drama, and dramatic duo, 50% were male and 50% were female. While there was a balance between the genders during preliminary rounds of competition,

the male/female ratio changed considerably at the outset of the elimination rounds. As a result, 61% of those participants advancing to the quarter-final rounds of competition were male and only 39% were female. The gap widened only slightly in semi-final rounds (66% male, 34% female) and then shifted back slightly in the final rounds of competition in the interpretive events (63% male, 37% female). During both preliminary and elimination rounds of competition in these events, drama (offered only at the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament) reflected the greatest male/female imbalance where 60% of the participants were male and 40% of the participants were female. In this event, those advancing to quarter-finals were 71% male and 29% female while those advancing to both semi-finals and finals were 83% male and only 17% female. While preliminary rounds of competition in poetry interpretation (44% male, 56% female) and prose interpretation (49% male, 51% female) indicate a slight female dominance, ratios of male/female participation in poetry interpretation shifted considerably by the final rounds of competition with 8 males (77%) and only 4 females (33%) advancing to the final rounds of competition. In prose interpretation, the slight female dominance shifted to male dominance by the quarter-final rounds (66% male, 44% female) and semi-final rounds (62% male, 38% female), but that ratio returned to a male/female balance of 6 males and 6 females advancing to final rounds in the event. While dramatic duo reflected a relative balance in preliminary rounds of competition (52% male, 48% female), that balance quickly shifted to a male dominance in elimination rounds that was maintained throughout the final rounds of competition with 62%

of the finalists as males and only 38% of the finalists as females.

Of the 534 participants in the limited preparation events of extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking, 64% were male and only 36% were female during the preliminary rounds of competition. As participants advanced to the elimination rounds, the male/female ratio of participation increased slightly for females (63% male, 37% female) advancing to quarter-final rounds; however, the male/female ratio of participation decreased considerably for females advancing to semi-final rounds of competition in these events (70% male, 30% female). By the final rounds of competition, these events reflected the greatest male/female ratio disparity of the three event groupings--79% were male and only 21% were female. Specifically, preliminary rounds of impromptu speaking competition included 63% males and only 37% females. By the final rounds of competition in this event, only 2 females (17%) advanced while 10 males (83%) advanced. Although the male/female participation ratio was a little lower for females in preliminary rounds of extemporaneous speaking (77% male, 33% female), 3 females (25%) did advance to the final rounds of competition in this event; as such, females in extemporaneous speaking maintained a lower drop rate in elimination rounds that females in impromptu speaking.

DISCUSSION

While exploratory research suggested that individual events is perceived to be a relatively gender-balanced activity, descriptive data from the 1984 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the 1984 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals

indicated a general balance in male/female participation ratios and a gender-based imbalance which favors male participants in the elimination rounds. While perceptions of the forensic community suggested that females may have a slight advantage in this activity (particularly in the interpretive events), that perception appeared to be inaccurate when compared to actual data reported from the two national individual events tournaments in 1984.

Specifically the forensic community perceives that original speaking events and limited preparation events reflect a slight male dominance; the data indicate a slight male dominance in the original speaking events and a distinct male dominance in the limited preparation events at both regional and national individual events tournaments. Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, is associated with the male/female participation and success in the interpretive events. While previous research suggests that these events were generally perceived to be more "feminine" and the ones most likely to provide a barrier to male participation because of conflicting sex-role expectations and stereotypes associated with the events, analysis of the data concerning male/female participation ratios at both regional and national tournaments does not support this perception. While females tend to dominate slightly this group of events at the preliminary level of competition in regional tournaments, males tend to dominate slightly this group of events in final rounds of competition at regional tournaments. At the national level of competition, there is a male/female balance in this event grouping in preliminary rounds of competition; however, there is an overwhelming male dominance in this

event grouping in the elimination rounds of competition at the national level.

While this finding appears to be inconsistent with typical perceptions of sex-role typing and the constraints of such typing, there may be some explanations for this phenomenon. First, the majority of the literature in our culture (especially prose and drama) has been written by males and about males--males write the best "parts" for males. As a result, literature which provides the most challenge for males may also provide the most viable outlet for success among males interpreting that literature. Second, those judging "success" in this activity may strive to reward males who are willing to violate sex-role typing because of the risk associated with such violation. As a result, the male who is willing to portray emotional and aesthetic aspects of literature may be more highly rewarded than his female counterpart who portrays such aspects in literature interpretation or who excells in the more cognitively-oriented aspects typically associated with the original speaking events. Perhaps what is most surprising, however, is the fact that a relative balance in both participation and success is preserved in regional tournaments which translates to a relative balance in participation at the national tournaments; however, success in this grouping of events at the national tournaments is overwhelmingly male-dominated.

Finally, it is important to note an overall gender difference between male/female participation and success at both regional and national tournaments in individual events. In general, the results from these 1984-85 regional tournaments and 1985 national tournaments indicate a

slight male dominance in participation and a male dominance in success that ranges from "moderate" (55% male, 45% female) in final rounds at regional tournaments to "overwhelming" (63% male, 37% female) in final rounds of national competition. Of the ten events at the regional tournaments, women comprised over 50% of the finalists in four events--informative speaking, persuasive speaking, poetry interpretation, and drama. Of the ten events at the national tournaments, women comprised over 50% of the quarter-finalists in only one event (informative speaking), over 50% of the semi-finalists in only one event (communication analysis/rhetorical criticism), and over 50% of the finalists in only two events (informative speaking and communication analysis/rhetorical criticism). Women comprised over 33% of the finalists in nine of the ten events at regional tournaments, while they comprised over 33% of the finalists in only four of the ten events at national tournaments. Again, it is interesting to note that while individual events is perceived by the forensic community as a gender-balanced activity (especially compared to debate), that relative gender balance extends primarily to participation and success at regional tournaments and participation at national tournaments; national success, however, is still primarily reserved for males regardless of the event grouping.

Perhaps it is important to note that the greatest disparity in both male/female success and participation at both regional and national tourna- levels of competition lies in the limited preparation events. It appears that it may be far more uncomfortable for females to break sex-role expectations and sex-role stereotypes in these events than it is for

males to break sex-role expectations and sex-role stereotypes related to the interpretive events. Because the level of male success in the interpretive events rises slightly in finals at regional tournaments and rises overwhelmingly at national tournaments while the level of female success in the limited preparation events drops considerably in the finals rounds at both regional and national tournaments, it appears that males are rewarded more for violating those sex-role expectations and stereotypes than females.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research provides an initial analysis of male/female participation and success at both regional and national individual events tournaments, it is only the first step necessary to identify some of the gender barriers confronted by participants in this educational activity. Within this initial analysis, however, the authors clearly recognize the need for continued research to identify and explore the impact of gender barriers in the activity.

First, similar research which examines the same type of data over a period including several regional and national tournaments would certainly provide a greater sense of "trend" than the current study. If this trend suggests a movement toward a balance in male/female participation, then we as forensic educators are heading in the right direction toward meeting the goal of providing this activity for all individuals regardless of gender. If, on the other hand, trends indicate levels of male/female disparity in participation and/or success, then a concerted effort to address and overcome these barriers must be undertaken.

Second, male/female participation and success in forensics should also be examined on a geographical basis of regions throughout the nation. Data from the national tournaments may be examined from a regionally-based perspective to indicate regional differences that will provide additional insight into addressing gender issues. In addition, continued data collection from regional tournaments throughout the year would provide helpful information to determine the male/female participation and success at the regional level of competition. Specifically, trends established at the regional level of competition should lay the groundwork for trends at national tournaments using regional competition as the qualifying method.

Third, additional levels of forensic participation as well as areas of forensic competition should be examined for male/female participation and success. For example, high school forensic competition and community college forensic competition should be examined to see if such disparities and potential gender barriers exist. In addition, such areas as NDT and CEDA debate should be included in exploratory research to determine if areas of forensics not explored in this research provide fewer gender barriers to participation.

Finally, research which focuses on the impact of gender among judges in the activity may offer the most valuable insight into why females are not experiencing the level of success in both activities as males. Since these individuals judge what is considered "successful" in this competitive activity, an examination of perceived gender variables and their impact on the competitive setting might begin to explain "why" such barriers occur.

CONCLUSION

While this research is somewhat limited in its scope, it does provide an exploratory examination of male/female participation and success at both regional and national levels of competition. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research is that some gender-based perceptions held by the forensic community may be supported while others are not. Although individual events may appear to be a gender-balanced and even slightly female-dominated activity as perceptions suggest, it does not provide as much gender balance as perceived by the forensic community. While participation in the activity may provide some relative balance for males and females, it appears that regardless of the event grouping, male dominance in success at both regional and national tournaments ranges from "slight" to "overwhelming." If gender-based perceptions in the forensic community are directly related to the participation and success of males and females in the activity, then such research may provide the key to bringing about awareness and eventual change of gender-based attitudes within the forensic community.

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